

MINUTES OF THE HATTIESBURG TOURISM COMMISSION BOARD MEMBERS & MANAGEMENT

Minutes of a regularly scheduled meeting of the Board Members of the Hattiesburg Tourism Commission of the City of Hattiesburg, Mississippi, held at Hattiesburg's Hotel Indigo on:

December 12, 2018

Be it remembered that on the 12th day of December, the Board Members of the Hattiesburg Tourism Commission met in a regular meeting in the conference room of Hotel Indigo Hattiesburg, being a place fixed by law for such meetings. Frank James, Chairman of the Hattiesburg Tourism Commission, called the meeting to order at 11:38 a.m. The following members of the Board were found to be in attendance:

PRESENT

Bonnie Warren
Frank James
Fei Xue, Ph.D.
Marshall Bell
Anthony Harris

ABSENT

Torksy Williams

ALSO PRESENT

Marlo Dorsey, Management
David Ott, Counsel
Paige Hunt, Sales and Visitor Services
Kristen Brock, Programs and Promotions

Citizens Forum

No community members were present for a Citizens Forum. Marlo took the opportunity to showcase items located in the front pocket of board binders. Included were two invitations, one for the VisitHattiesburg Christmas Social scheduled for Thursday, December 13 at the Hotel Indigo and the other for the Downtown Hattiesburg Association's Christmas Social scheduled for December 17 at the home of David Ott. Commissioners were invited to attend both events.

The new HBURG Visitor Guide was also presented, a pocket-sized overview of tourism offerings in Hattiesburg that will be delivered to all state Welcome Centers and various facilities around Hattiesburg for use by visitors. A save-the-date for the Hattie Hundred was also presented, with Kristen Brock providing a brief update of her time spent at the National Bicycle Tourism Conference in San Antonio in November and increased efforts in Hattiesburg for this more than \$82 billion-dollar industry of bicycle tourism.

Minutes from Previous Board Meetings

Upon motion made by Bonnie Warren, duly seconded by Anthony Harris, there was a favorable vote of the Board to approve the minutes from the most recent meeting held on October 24, 2018.

Financial Report

Marlo presented the financial report. Included was a document with updated tax receipts for the commission's 2% special hotel levy. The report showed a 6% overall decrease in 2018 compared to the year prior but a significant increase for the month of October due to more accurate collections following work with the Mississippi Department of Revenue to require payments from all hotel properties in Hattiesburg. Collections for November 2018 were \$63,001. Regarding lower hotel occupancy figures for 2018, reports show a decrease in corporate and government travel over the past year. VisitHattiesburg is working with meeting facilities to provide more consistency to the market in terms of corporate travel and is providing strategies ensuring continuity in meeting facility responses to corporate groups.

A Claims Docket for the months of October and November was presented along with reconciled balances of all Hattiesburg Tourism Commission liquid assets through November 30, 2018, showing a \$140,000 increase in the Commission's Money Market since the last board meeting due to reduced costs and savings over the last two months.

Marlo reported that the MS Department of Revenue performed an audit of the Commission's finances, which were correct for the years of 2016, 2017, and 2018. Findings showed a discrepancy of \$986.08 for the year 2015, which has since been paid. In addition, Marlo filed a required report to the MS Office of Treasurer so they may continue providing security of all Commission accounts holding more than \$250,000.

Upon motion made by Anthony Harris and duly seconded by Fei Xue, there was a unanimous favorable vote to approve all financial reports as presented.

Marlo will present a line-item report of the FY2019 budget with full update at the February meeting.

Old Business

A copy of a news release regarding the resolution of the Hattiesburg Tourism Commission auditor's demand was provided, which Marlo said was covered by all local media outlets including print and tv. In addition, board members were presented with a copy of a statement sent statewide by the State Auditor's Office related to the Commission's settlement of the demand.

The Board agreed that all money recovered from the insurance company in relation to the auditor's demand will be placed in the Commission's primary Money Market to be set aside until a decision is made on how the funds will best be allocated.

Marshall Bell, Bonnie Warren, and Anthony Harris all shared appreciation to Marlo and staff, Frank James, and David Ott for their efforts in successfully navigating through the audit process which is now officially closed.

New Business

Marlo presented a PEER Committee report by the Mississippi Legislature's Joint Committee on Performance Evaluation and Expenditure Review. This special group of the MS Legislature is designed to research and provide reports on certain topics across the state, with this one focused on special tax levies for tourism departments in Mississippi. \$93 million is collected each year for tourism efforts, and the opinion of the Committee is that not all funds are being properly used. The Committee released guidelines on how they feel special tax levies should be spent.

Marlo reported that she recently met with Senator Lydia Chassaniol, chair of MS Senate Tourism Committee, accompanied by Milton Segarra, CEO of Visit Mississippi Gulf Coast, to discuss the PEER Report and a bill that Senator Chassaniol intends to introduce during the upcoming legislative session regarding a permanent funding solution and ultimate increase in state tourism funding. Following that meeting, Marlo and Milton had a call with legislative attorneys, along with the MTA lobbyist and other MTA officers, as representatives of the tourism industry's desires to work to strengthen the tourism industry throughout the state.

Marlo then presented highlights of Hattiesburg's regional market campaign which targeted specific audiences in geographical areas including Birmingham, Tuscaloosa, Slidell, Memphis, and Mobile. In the month of November, 396,577 messages were delivered via the campaign with 244+ hours of total exposure for Hattiesburg. In addition, a travel writer from *Wherever I May Roam* was hosted by VisitHattiesburg, and a copy of her blog feature on the area's offerings was provided to board members.

Paige Hunt gave a Sales and Visitor Services activities report. She recently held a HBURG Facilities Meeting, which was attended by managers of meeting facilities in Hattiesburg where they were presented with a copy of Vision 20/20, a short-term strategic plan for Hattiesburg, and industry goals were laid out for the group. Moving forward, these facility partners will be included in HBURG Hotel & Hospitality Association meetings held quarterly. Paige continues to focus on the meetings market and recently held a Fall Sales Blitz in Jackson and attended the annual conference of the MS Society of Association Executives. In addition to the meetings market, increasing government groups in Hattiesburg will be a focus in 2019.

Paige also reported the youth sports market in Hattiesburg continues to grow. The Hattiesburg Youth Soccer Association was awarded the bid to host a state soccer tournament in May 2019 and Hattiesburg Dixie Youth Baseball partnered with VisitHattiesburg to submit a bid for the 2019 Invitational World Series, for which a decision will be announced in late January 2019. In addition, the MS High School Activities Association hosted all state championship football games in Hattiesburg on November 29 and December 1, which had an estimated \$3.7 million economic impact on the community. VisitHattiesburg is also trying to increase group tour travel from the international market, attracting international visitors traveling between Nashville and New Orleans.

Marlo provided an update on the strategic plan process for VisitHattiesburg. In 2018, the Board approved a \$50,000 allocation to be spent on a long-term strategic plan process for Hattiesburg and the Request for Proposal process for this project will begin in January 2019. An update will be provided at the next commission meeting.

Kristen Brock provided a Programs and Promotions update, which included a report on the cooperative agreement with Downtown Hattiesburg that currently includes work on a new, mobile-responsive website for the downtown district. Other websites on which VisitHattiesburg is currently partnering to make more visitor-friendly are for the Longleaf Trace and Freedom Summer Trail.

Kristen also provided an update on the Tourism Grant Program, designed to competitively award financial support to tourism-generating projects in FY2019. Seventeen applications were submitted for funding this year, of which fourteen were selected by an independent review panel to receive TGP funding. Of the fourteen selected, an agreement was not returned by USM Athletics for the Southern Miss Gameday Series and funding for that project was forfeited. Four grantee payments are pending and eight payments were awarded and mailed this week. In all, \$22,625 of \$30,000 TGP funding has been granted and a second round of grant applications will be accepted in FY2019 to award the remaining allocation of funds.

A report was given on the Mississippi Miss Hospitality program, with an announcement that three new programs have already been secured for 2019 including Tupelo, Gulfport, and Greenville.

Upon motion made by Anthony Harris and duly seconded by Fei Xue, there was discussion to consider entering Executive Session followed by a unanimous favorable vote to enter Executive Session for the purpose of legal updates.

During Executive Session, legal updates were provided regarding the settled demand with the Office of the State Auditor for matters stemming from 2008-2013. Additionally, personnel matters were discussed resulting in the Commissioners approving a salary increase for the current executive director effective the following pay period. The Board also approved for Chairman James to work out a vehicle solution for use by the executive director for VisitHattiesburg, as it is standard practice for tourism entities.

Being no other business, the meeting was adjourned.

Hattiesburg Tourism Commission:

Frank James, Board Chair

Attested:

Marlo Dorsey, Executive Director